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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 9 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

Informal dialogue with country teams (continued)

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), speaking as United Nations Resident Coordinator in Malawi, said that he would address matters relating to coordination and governance in that country.

In the context of growing internal dissent, in May 1992 the Malawi consultative group had suspended non-humanitarian aid to Malawi because of human rights abuses. In October 1992 the Government had requested United Nations support for a national referendum. From that time, until the successful completion of the first multi-party elections in May 1994, the United Nations had played a key role in supporting the peaceful transition to a multi-party democracy. During that period UNDP had managed projects, funded by multiple donors, supporting the referendum, the elections and constitutional reform.

He continued to chair regular donor meetings to provide a forum for coordinated support for the consolidation of democracy and human rights and to explore the links between development and governance. A donor subcommittee met weekly to deal with technical and programming aspects of coordinating assistance to governance.

The Government had established an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights and Democracy following the signature in August 1994 of an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on a programme to realize the long-term benefits of the recent political changes. A country officer had been in place since 1995 to support the Government, civil society and the United Nations team on those important issues. Many specialized agencies of the United Nations system interacted with the new Parliament and civil society organizations on a wide range of issues.

Malawi faced serious constraints in implementing its ambitious programme of reform, including financial limits in a period of severe structural adjustment and limited technical and managerial capacities. Fortunately, the country had

been able to reattract most of the donor countries which had withdrawn assistance in 1992.

Malawi's experience over the past four years was viewed by many as an ideal, if not unique, example of government and donor coordination. Concerns as to how to improve coordination were being addressed through the implementation of the results of a recent donor retreat - at which the Government also had been represented - on improving development cooperation. Despite serious constraints, the Government increasingly was taking the lead in mobilizing donor support for its policies and programmes.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that, although Malawi was a poor country, it had great potential. The Government had endorsed 14 new policies within the past two years, of which the most important was the decision to devote priority to poverty alleviation. All the policies were supported by organizations of the United Nations system.

In June 1994, free and universal primary education had been established. Enrolment had immediately increased from 1.9 to 3.2 million children. The United Nations family of organizations and bilateral donors had worked closely with the Government to establish an education investment plan.

The Government had also adopted a new health policy, which focused on basic services, primary health care and community empowerment. The United Nations family continued to attach high priority to breast-feeding, nutrition interventions and micronutrients.

Since only one third of the population had access to safe drinking water and only 6 per cent to improved sanitation, the Government had instituted a water and sanitation policy focusing on community-based water management, with equal attention to sanitation, hygiene and appropriate technologies. The United Nations supported those efforts and collaborated closely with many non-governmental organizations.

Another key policy focused on youth, particularly those below the age of 15. Their situation was critical because the education system currently lost 50 per cent of students before they attained permanent literacy. The United Nations family had organized a national volunteer programme with university graduates serving as domestic volunteers, with a view to encouraging behavioural change in young people.

For Malawi to develop, leadership must come from within, and the United Nations had worked to build new partnerships to encourage national ownership of the development process. A new non-governmental organization policy was promoting greater collaboration among donors and the Government.

Ms. LARSEN (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that many of Malawi's poorest households, especially those headed by women, began to run out of food three months after the harvest period. Poor households used three basic strategies to acquire food: directly through household production, which accounted for 25 per cent of food needs; through participation in income-generating activities, which accounted for approximately 45 per cent; and through resort to various coping strategies, accounting for about 30 per cent. Specific strategies were used at different times of the year and efforts were under way to develop annual survival calendars for all 154 extension planning areas in the country.

The United Nations family of organizations and the World Bank were collaborating on the development of new vulnerability analysis and monitoring systems to establish a common geographical basis for development and relief programming and targeting in the food security sector.

A number of new policy initiatives and programmes in the sector provided common ground for enhanced coordination and collaborative programming among the United Nations agencies. Key areas included: the poverty alleviation policy framework; food security programmes; the agriculture and livestock 10-year plan; national nutrition policy; income-generating and employment support programmes; and disaster management and preparedness. United Nations theme groups on food security and disaster management brought together representatives from UNDP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and WFP. Agricultural diversification and support for natural resource management were two areas of collaboration.

In the transition from relief to development, the new United Nations approach to food aid focused on the use of targeted food-for-work programmes and a new emphasis on micronutrient deficiencies. Great emphasis also was placed on using food aid to promote improved nutritional practices for women and early childhood education.

Mr. MUBIALA (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that gender issues had increasingly gained importance in the design and implementation of

development programmes in Malawi. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, whose status currently was lower than that of men in all respects, was a key element of the Government's poverty alleviation policy framework. More than 20 non-governmental organizations dealt with gender concerns in the country.

All the United Nations agencies and the World Bank were represented on the United Nations theme group on gender, which a consultant currently was assisting to formulate a common United Nations gender policy. He described relevant programmes supported by UNFPA, WFP, UNDP and UNICEF. The programmes were coordinated in other areas, including reproductive health and support for women's legal rights. The Centre for Human Rights was assisting with building capacity to enable the Government to comply with its reporting responsibilities under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Gender concerns could be addressed more effectively once the common United Nations gender policy and plan of action were in place, once those agencies which currently faced staffing constraints could participate more fully in inter-agency activities and once more women held key positions in Government, particularly at the policy-making level.

Dr. CHUWA (World Health Organization (WHO)) cited statistics indicating how hard Malawi had been hit by the AIDS epidemic and underscored the personal, social and economic impact of the epidemic. Among the key policies and strategies established by the Government to cope with the epidemic were the following: a population policy which promoted condom use and the integration of education on AIDS and reproductive health; the participation of youth in AIDS prevention activities; the introduction of policy guidelines which encouraged the care of orphans in the extended family and the community; the promotion of home-based care and counselling and the encouragement of support groups to participate in those activities; the promotion of blood safety; and the assignment of high priority to the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

A thematic group on HIV/AIDS had been established to coordinate the work of the United Nations family of organizations under the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Total United Nations system funding to combat AIDS in Malawi for the current year was approximately $2 million. In the coming months, coordination efforts would focus on the promotion of an integrated

expanded response to the epidemic, the promotion of international best practices, joint funding and a joint evaluation of the national programme.

A critical issue was how to ensure that the 50 per cent of the population of Malawi currently free of HIV (children ages 5 to 15) remained free of the virus. Intervention was needed to promote sustained risk-free behaviours starting at a very early age. Malawi also recognized the importance of facilitating the treatment of opportunistic conditions in AIDS patients and of helping them to die with dignity. The provision of drugs to manage and treat sexually transmitted diseases was crucial to the control of the epidemic. Malawi also needed to strengthen the response to the epidemic within a development framework analysis that recognized the importance of addressing gender inequality and promoting community empowerment and sustainable human development. Additional funds to combat the epidemic were needed. Lastly, the specialized agencies must work out arrangements for funding administrative support for the country programme adviser, and efforts must be made to ensure that UNAIDS activities formed a truly integrated United Nations programme.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that team-building experience gained by the agencies and subsequent agreement on specific work plans had aided their coordination efforts. A United Nations country coordination committee had already reviewed in detail new programmes prepared by UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The programmes proposed by UNDP, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the International Labour Organization would be reviewed in September. The agencies had also been meeting as a group with representatives of the Malawi Government to ensure greater cohesiveness with respect to policy-making and operational activities.

The theme groups were supervised by the heads of agencies; the most active were those concerned with AIDS, gender, food security and nutrition, and disaster management. New groups had been established to deal with water, poverty, governance and youth. More work was needed in public information activities, however. Overall donor coordination in Malawi was extensive, with some 12 active sectoral or thematic groupings besides the United Nations theme groups.

The mid-term evaluation of the UNFPA and UNICEF country programmes had been carried out in December 1994, with the involvement of other agencies, and the UNDP mid-term evaluation had been completed in February 1994. In 1996 a common

evaluation would be undertaken of the UNAIDS programme as a basis for more effective joint programming in the future.

The following areas had been identified for joint programming: poverty monitoring and analysis; UNAIDS; gender; food security and nutrition; district and community development; and youth. Two other areas of common interest were building partnerships with civil society and increasing the use of national human and technological resources.

The Government had initiated work on the country strategy note in 1995. With United Nations support, it would be organizing a national social summit at which the draft country strategy note would be reviewed in the context of national action plans for follow-up to major United Nations conferences. Studies were being initiated on the impact on Malawi of implementing the 20/20 compact and on the relationship of existing and projected development programmes with the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. The United Nations team had offered to help pilot the common country assessment that was being developed by the Joint Consultative Group on Policies (JCGP) and believed that it was vital to strengthen national capacity for that purpose.

The evaluation of the UNDP country programme had shown positive achievements, notably in establishing a financial monitoring and reporting system. Consultations had been held with other United Nations agencies to determine how that system might support them. A UNDCF-financed and UNDP-supported district development fund would help ensure that funds were available for communities.

For various reasons, cooperation with the World Bank had not been extensive in the period 1992-1994; from 1995, more extensive cooperation had developed through consultative group meetings, participation of World Bank staff in theme group activities, and joint programming.

The Government had allocated land for common premises in June 1991; it was hoped that construction would start late in 1997. Common services were limited since all six agencies were located in separate buildings. UNDP continued to provide financial and personnel services to the other five agencies and UNAIDS, and consideration was being given to establishing a common support facility in Blantyre. The operations managers met on a regular basis to harmonize procedures and regulations and shared the capacity to conduct system-wide surveys and meet other requirements.

There were a number of priority coordination issues. The lack of full-time staff support was a major constraint, there having been a 50 per cent reduction in UNDP international staff since 1994. Assistance to the Government in aid management was a priority concern. The integration of the World Bank and UNDP programme approaches would be a useful first step in helping the Government build the capacity to develop national programmes on which donors could base decisions for support. More needed to be done to harmonize procedures within the United Nations system. Further guidance on policy and programme harmonization in such areas as gender and poverty would be productive for country-level activities. Consistency in the decentralization of authority to country representatives would also help in terms of system cohesion and programme management and implementation. The exchange of staff through the resident coordinator system was an excellent mechanism for harmonization.

Ms. SIRVE (Finland) asked whether the Malawi country team felt that there was sufficient decentralization in Malawi; how much coordination there was with non-governmental organizations, and what problems arose; what kind of indicators were being used for follow-up to the 20/20 compact and what was being done to involve national authorities in that process; how sustainability was being ensured in the UNICEF immunization campaign; and whether the international staff who had left the Malawi office were being replaced by local staff.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that the level of decentralization in UNICEF and UNDP made it easier to respond flexibly to emerging opportunities and needs. UNDP benefited from effective backstopping by specialized agencies, and that decentralization made its work more effective and timely.

There had been a large increase in the number of non-governmental organizations in Malawi because of the changing political situation. A government/non-governmental organization/donor working group was looking at non-governmental organization policy, legislation and codes of conduct. Problems arose because of the very limited capacity of non-governmental organizations and the need to ensure that the support provided did not detract from sustainability, ownership or capacity-building. The issue of balance between central Government, local government, village communities and non-governmental organizations was very important and still had to be worked out.

A study of the 20/20 concept had been started, using a national consultant. The Government of Malawi was preparing an analysis of its progress in implementing the commitments entered into at recent United Nations conferences and was planning to hold a national social summit to review action plans. It had increased the allocation of resources from the national budget to basic social services and, with the assistance of the World Bank, was ensuring that basic services did not suffer as the government budget was reduced.

In addition to the 50 per cent reduction in Professional posts, the Malawi United Nations office had lost two core national officer posts and four General Service posts. Some of the posts would be funded from extrabudgetary resources.

Ms. THUNYANI (Observer for Malawi) asked what the experience of the United Nations system had been in Malawi following the change of Government and what steps were being taken to deal with the growing problems of orphans of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNICEF had a fourfold strategy for sustaining its immunization campaign: encouraging increased government funding for vaccines and drugs; education of mothers, especially through the safe motherhood programme, and an enhanced Expanded Programme on Immunization covering micronutrients; involvement of other partners, particularly schoolteachers, members of Parliament, and also herbalists and traditional healers; and use of the radio, increasingly in vernacular languages, to inform parents about the necessity of immunizing their children. In addition, the Governments of Germany, Japan and the United States of America and the World Bank had provided funds for vaccines and drugs.

Mr. ACEMAH (Uganda) said that the problems faced by Malawi were similar to those of other African countries in the subregion, and some of them had regional implications. He asked whether there was a mechanism to achieve coordination at the subregional level and, if so, how effective it was.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that the experience of the Malawi country team with the new Government had been very positive. In the area of coordination, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development was meeting donors on a monthly basis to share information and exchange views. The Malawi country team was trying to systematize the support it provided to members of Parliament, including assistance for their efforts to take development messages to their

constituencies, and helping human rights non-governmental organizations to conduct lobbying in Parliament. The Government was making efforts to establish new human rights institutions and ensure effective civic education, and was formulating a wide range of new policies.

There was some ad hoc subregional coordination; the Government of Malawi had requested the Government of Uganda to provide advice on decentralization. UNICEF, UNDP and WFP had organized many more meetings than in the past among their representatives in Africa and southern Africa. Recently UNDP had organized a meeting of the 15 resident representatives of southern Africa to establish networks on poverty, the environment, communications, AIDS and other topics. With modern communications, very effective networking was possible, and it was being supported by training and coordination workshops. The United Nations was working increasingly with Governments to improve networking in southern Africa.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) asked whether it was true that the Government of Malawi had a poverty eradication programme and, if so, how United Nations programmes were integrated in it.

Ms. LARSEN (World Food Programme) said that the Government of Malawi had a poverty eradication programme and the United Nations had been actively involved in identifying areas in which it could provide assistance. WFP was particularly involved in vulnerability analysis and monitoring systems, along with the United States Agency for International Development.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that the Government of Malawi had approved a poverty alleviation policy framework incorporating its various sectoral and thematic initiatives and had asked each ministry and sector to develop programmes within that framework. It had also set up a technical committee to develop a poverty monitoring system. UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank needed to work together at the global and country levels in supporting poverty monitoring and analysis.

Mr. MURAOKA (Japan) said that coordination between bilateral donors was crucial for the effective performance of the United Nations system's operational activities and requested further clarification on how such coordination was achieved.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that there was a high level of donor coordination in Malawi, which was being complemented by

increasing government involvement, especially in the fields of education, health and agriculture. However, there was a need for a more result-oriented approach to programming on the part of the United Nations system in Malawi and for ways to manage more effectively the many programmes and projects being started there, so as to reduce the burden on the Government.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) asked for further elaboration by the resident coordinator on how harmonization and coordination could be made more productive, how inter-agency complementarity could be enhanced, and how the Government of Malawi could participate in the process. Under the harmonized approach, monitoring and evaluation should be a collaborative effort, so as to ensure the utmost transparency.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that, while effective bilateral and trilateral coordination was taking place in Malawi, it was not always possible for all agencies to collaborate on a single programme. Moreover, it was necessary to consider carefully the needs and capacities of communities when designing incentives and support for their development efforts. UNDP was examining ways to work more effectively with local authorities through the district planning mechanism so that programmes were decentralized but not undertaken in isolation.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) asked whether it would be possible to organize joint medium-term evaluations in the context of coordinated budget and programming cycles. Secondly, with regard to the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, it would be of interest to know how coordination with the World Bank and other Bretton Woods institutions could be improved. Thirdly, he asked to what extent the resident coordinator was personally affected by the increased workload resulting from the staffing cutbacks and to whom he was accountable. Fourthly, he would appreciate an explanation of the six-year delay in construction of the common premises of the United Nations system in Malawi. Finally, he asked whether staff exchanges were taking place between the various agencies of the United Nations system.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that, where evaluation was concerned, there was a need to confirm the existence of sound government programmes that could be monitored jointly, as for example the district-based programmes and partnerships currently being undertaken. With regard to mid-term reviews, he said that UNDP intended to undertake a joint

mid-term programme review in 1999. Referring to the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, he said that various coordination mechanisms were still being developed and that priorities needed to be established in consultation with the Government of Malawi and the World Bank.

As resident coordinator, he received the bulk of his instructions from the UNDP Administrator, his main relationship was with the UNDP regional bureau, and his primary preoccupation was with UNDP matters. He recognized the need for greater clarity regarding the role, function and reporting responsibilities of the resident coordinators and ways in which the system could continue to evolve. While he attempted to delegate work to the deputy resident coordinator, the overall decrease in staff sometimes resulted in the workload again reverting upwards.

With regard to common premises, he explained that the construction delay had been due to legal obstacles and changes in the local political situation. Finally, on the subject of staff exchanges, he said that UNDP supported the broadening of the pool of staff being drawn on for the resident coordinator position. Very little staff exchange was taking place at other levels, however.

Mr. HJELMAKER (Sweden) asked for a further elaboration of ways to achieve better collaboration with the World Bank in the context of African development, including the closer linkage of country strategy notes (CSNs) with the World Bank's policy framework papers (PFPs).

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that relations between the World Bank and UNDP had recently improved. Even though their mandates differed, they could reinforce the effectiveness of each other's programmes. With regard to CSNs and PFPs, he said that previous policy analysis had been driven more by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) than by the Government, which had lacked the capacity to play a greater role. The CSN being the weaker instrument for leveraging resources, there was a need to ensure greater participation and transparency at the country level in the development of the PFP which, moreover, continued to emphasize macroeconomic adjustment.

Ms. GUERREIRO (Portugal) asked what types of collaboration existed in Malawi between the United Nations agencies, the resident coordinator and the Government. She agreed with previous speakers that the United Nations

System-wide Special Initiative on Africa would provide a useful mechanism for better coordination.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said there was a lack of commitment to the resident coordinator system at the headquarters of United Nations agencies, which should provide more precise guidelines for their field representatives. Since UNDP was the focal point for the resident coordinator system, it should be represented at agency headquarters and should maintain an ongoing dialogue with the agencies.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that it was important to preserve the different identities of the organizations, especially at the country level, where there was a clear understanding of their individual roles, responsibilities and mandates. Increased focal support from headquarters was needed in areas where the organizations could work together. Over the past year, the commitment by headquarters to the resident coordinator system and the type of information they were providing to their representatives in the field had greatly improved.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund), replying to the Observer for Malawi, said that there were currently 300,000 orphans in Malawi, a number which would increase to 800,000 by the turn of the century. The Government defined an orphan as a child below the age of 15 years without a mother. Over the past year, the United Nations had worked closely and successfully with the Government of Malawi to develop a national policy for orphaned children, the main elements of which were a community-based family care system with income-generating activities for women, safety nets and support mechanisms to help families cope with additional orphans in the household, and preschools to accommodate the two million children in Malawi under the age of 6. In addition to the very positive response by the Malawi Government, churches had played a major role by helping to keep orphans in school.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) asked for the views of UNICEF on the management excellence programme and those of WHO on the adequacy of the United Nations response to the AIDS epidemic in Malawi.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund) said that the management excellence programme was a process in which all staff members had participated and been heard. The process had led to the development of new guiding principles on commitment and conduct. The overall approach had been to promote

management excellence at the country level by reviewing the career development and training requirements of staff members, improving collaboration with non-governmental organizations and enhancing cooperation with Governments. Because UNICEF received considerable funding from the private sector and international donors, its staff and officers were keenly aware that the credibility and accountability of their organization depended on its ability to ensure that resources were spent wisely. She believed that there should be more inter-agency exchanges involving the management excellence programme.

Mr. CHUWA (World Health Organization), in reply to a question of the representative of France, said that combating AIDS was comparable to fighting a war and that therefore resources were continually needed. The war against AIDS in Malawi had not yet been won. In fact, there was a critical lack of financial resources, equipment and personnel. While the Government in Malawi had welcomed the support of UNAIDS, there continued to be a need for drugs, blood-processing equipment and other forms of humanitarian assistance. He urged the United Nations and other organizations to help step up the fight against the AIDS epidemic in Malawi in the hope that their assistance would alleviate the dangerous situation in that country.

Mr. MUBIALA (United Nations Population Fund) said that UNFPA, which had been operating in Malawi for the past two decades, welcomed the positive support and commitment which it had received since the change of Government in 1994. Since then, the concept of family planning had become much more widely accepted and discussed, a development which had greatly facilitated the work of UNFPA. In another encouraging step, the Parliament had recently adopted a separate budget line for population activities.

In reply to a question put by the representative of Finland regarding decentralization, he said that UNFPA had been experimenting for the past few years in Malawi and several other countries with a system of "decentralized approval authority" whereby country representatives could review projects and make allocations of resources. That new approach had greatly improved the timely implementation of projects, which currently took three months to execute from the moment of formulation rather than six to nine months. In the area of coordination among donors, UNFPA had held consultations with bilateral donors on the formulation of a new cycle of assistance to ensure that UNFPA funding complemented funding by other donors and that family planning programmes reached

all parts of the country. He agreed there should be joint monitoring of programmes and said that UNFPA was working together with WHO to improve the joint monitoring of their programmes.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.